



## MEMORANDUM

To: Behavioral Health Partners

From: Aliya Jones, M.D., MBA   
Deputy Secretary Behavioral Health

Date: November 20, 2020

Re: Encouragement to Follow Guidance to Remain Safe During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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As many of us are aware, the number of positive cases of COVID-19 are rising and the 7-day average of national hospitalizations is at its highest since the onset on COVID-19. As a result, to keep communities safe and prevent the spread of COVID-19, Governor Hogan reiterated safety measures, including a **statewide masking order**. It requires everyone to wear masks or face coverings in the public spaces of all businesses across the state and at outdoor public areas when it is not possible to maintain physical distancing. Additionally, as the Governor has stated the following measures are in effect:

- **Indoor gatherings.** With contact tracing data showing an uptick in cases resulting from family gatherings and house parties, state health officials have issued a public health advisory strongly discouraging indoor gatherings of 25 people or more.
- **Mandatory telework.** A period of mandatory telework has been implemented across state agencies, except for essential direct public-facing services and other essential personnel. State officials strongly encourage all businesses to take immediate steps to expand telework.
- **Hospital surge capacity.** State health officials have issued an emergency order expanding hospital surge capacity that provides state EMS officials with the flexibility to shift patients to alternate care sites and to add capacity at those sites if the need arises.
- **Nursing homes and assisted living facilities.** State health officials have issued new guidance for slowing the spread of COVID-19 at nursing homes and assisted living facilities. Marylanders should stay home if sick and get tested before they visit their loved ones.

The Maryland Department of Health recently launched [MD COVID Alert](#), a contact tracing app for Marylanders to opt into COVID-19 exposure notifications on their smartphones. MD COVID Alert uses Bluetooth to notify users who may have been exposed to someone who tested positive for the virus. I would encourage all of us to download this app.

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It is vital that we continue to keep the lines of communication open. It is my promise to you that we will share information and resources as they become available. Building and sustaining community wellness, preventing morbidity, and saving lives in partnership with you remains our main objective.

The Behavioral Health Administration through its FAQs, guidance, and various webinars will keep you up to date on all safety guidance and policies that will help keep you, your families, your co-workers, and those in your care safe. This information will continue to be posted on the BHA webpage:

<https://bha.health.maryland.gov/Pages/bha-covid-19>. Additionally, I will also continue to provide you the latest information through my monthly letter. If you have any questions about how to operate safely during this time that have not been answered in our FAQs, please fill out [this form](#) or email your questions to: [bha.inquiries@maryland.gov](mailto:bha.inquiries@maryland.gov).

Finally, I want to take this time to thank OTPs and Residential/Congregate Living Facilities providers for sending us information about the positive COVID-19 cases in your programs, as the provider types designated to use the new BHA Positive COVID-19 Test [Reporting Form](#) and [Protocol](#) for OTPs and Residential/Congregate Living Facilities. We appreciate your support in sending these communications and encourage you to keep them coming. These communications offer the opportunity for a coordinated response with local jurisdictions and health departments and in identifying any state-wide proactive response needed to prevent additional spread of this virus, which can save more lives.

It is essential that we continue to follow the latest CDC guidelines, the Governor's Executive Orders, any guidance from local Jurisdictional Executive Orders, and those that BHA provides as a measure to keep all of us safe, and our programs stable. Please remember to wear your masks, wash your hands, maintain social distancing, get your flu shot, and encourage others to do so as well. These simple measures will make all the difference to maintaining healthier communities throughout Maryland.

Thank you. Stay well, and please safely enjoy your Thanksgiving holiday.